United Nations A/70/836–S/2016/360

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
20 April 2016

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda item 68
Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, which covers the period from January to December 2015, is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2225 (2015). It highlights recent global trends regarding the impact of armed conflict on children and provides information on grave violations committed against children in 2015. The main activities with regard to the implementation of relevant Council resolutions and the conclusions of the Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict are outlined. In line with the resolutions of the Council, the annexes to the report include a list of parties that engage in the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and/or hospitals and attacks or threats of attacks against protected personnel,[1] and the abduction of children.

2. All the information provided in the present report and its annexes has been vetted for accuracy by the United Nations. In situations in which the ability to obtain or independently verify information is hampered by such factors as insecurity or access restrictions, it is qualified as such. The preparation of the report and its annexes involved broad consultations within the United Nations, at Headquarters and in the field, and with relevant Member States.

3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), and in identifying situations that fall within the scope of her mandate, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has adopted a pragmatic approach on the issue, with an emphasis on humanitarian principles aimed at ensuring broad and effective protection for children. Reference to a situation is not a legal determination and reference to a non-State actor does not affect its legal status.

[1] Under Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), protected persons are considered to be teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.

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II. Addressing the impact of armed conflict on children

A. Trends and developments

4. Serious challenges for the protection of children affected by armed conflict continued throughout 2015. The impact on children of our collective failure to prevent and end conflict is severe, and the present report highlights the increased intensity of grave violations in a number of situations of armed conflict. Those violations are directly related to the denigration of the respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by parties to conflict.

5. Protracted conflicts had a substantial impact on children. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the five-year conflict has caused the deaths of more than 250,000 people, including thousands of children. In Afghanistan in 2015, the highest number of child casualties was recorded since the United Nations began systematically documenting civilian casualties in 2009. In Somalia, the situation continued to be perilous, with an increase of 50 per cent in the number of recorded violations against children compared with 2014, with many hundreds of children recruited, used, killed and maimed. In a most troubling example, in South Sudan, children were victims of all six grave violations, in particular during brutal military offensives against opposition forces.

6. In Yemen, a particularly worrisome escalation of conflict has been seen. The United Nations verified a fivefold increase in the number of children recruited in 2015 compared with the previous year. This compounded a sixfold increase in the number of children killed and maimed in the same period. These alarming trends continued into early 2016.

7. Attacks on schools and hospitals were prevalent in 2015, linked to the increasing use of air strikes and explosive weapons in populated areas. Armed groups particularly targeted girls' access to education, although attacks on schools and hospitals were also carried out by government forces. Member States should consider, where necessary, changes in policies, military procedures and legislation to protect schools and hospitals.

8. The proliferation of actors involved in armed conflicts was a particular concern. Cross-border aerial operations conducted by international coalitions or individual Member States, especially in populated areas, resulted in highly complex environments for the protection of children. Indiscriminate aerial bombardments have hit medical and education facilities and crowded markets, causing child casualties. The many actors involved in hostilities posed challenges for monitoring and reporting and to the efforts of the United Nations to engage with parties to conflict to prevent child casualties.

9. In its resolution 2225 (2015), the Security Council expressed grave concern regarding the abduction of children in situations of armed conflict and requested those parties to armed conflict that engaged in patterns of abduction of children to be listed in the present report. Abductions continued to be perpetrated on a wide scale by Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), with the number significantly increasing in Afghanistan and South Sudan.

10. The reporting period was marked by most disturbing cases of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations peacekeepers and civilians and non-United Nations international forces. Sexual exploitation and abuse by those entrusted to protect civilians is particularly egregious. I have initiated a robust response to allegations against United Nations personnel, following the recommendations of the external independent review panel on sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeeping forces in the Central African Republic. I am pleased that the Security Council, through its resolution 2272 (2016), endorsed my decision to repatriate military or police units when there is credible evidence of widespread or systemic sexual exploitation or abuse by those units and asked the United Nations to gather and preserve evidence of incidents in peacekeeping operations. The measures represent important steps in ensuring that there is accountability for those who commit these atrocious acts.

11. Notwithstanding the significant concerns relating to the protection of children affected by armed conflict, progress has been made. The momentum generated by the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign remained strong. In particular, continued commitment by Governments towards their action plans was demonstrated in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. The Sudan, the only campaign country without a written commitment, in March 2016 signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces. Information on progress is included in the country-specific sections of the present report. In the light of the upcoming final year of the campaign, my Special Representative, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other stakeholders will increase their efforts to support the implementation of actions plans in place with government forces.

12. There was also strong engagement with a number of listed non-State armed groups. Engaging the plethora of non-State armed groups in existence is complex, and a multifaceted approach is necessary, taking into consideration the operational environments. Political dialogue and peace and ceasefire negotiations represent opportunities to reach out to parties to conflict regarding the protection of children. The early consideration of children's protection needs in negotiations is vital, and engagement with parties to conflict on issues such as the release and separation of children can also provide a starting point for discussions. The United Nations engaged strongly during the reporting period with non-State armed groups, both inside and outside peace processes, from the Central African Republic, Colombia, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Sudan and the Sudan. Progress in this regard is also reflected in the country sections of the present report.

B. Reducing the impact of violent extremism on children

13. Children have been significantly affected by violent extremism in recent years and were often the direct targets of acts intended to cause maximum civilian casualties and terrorize communities, including by depicting children as "executioners" or forcing them to be suicide bombers. The distribution of violent images and videos on social media placed the plight of children caught in the middle of these conflicts at the forefront of the world's collective consciousness. Acts of violent extremism are abhorrent and Member States have obligations to ensure that their responses comply with international law to ensure that civilians are protected from these groups. The Security Council has emphasized that efforts to

counter extreme violence must be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.

14. It is noted herein that some military responses against non-State armed groups perpetrating violent extremism raised challenges for the protection of children. In some cases, State-allied militia and vigilante groups have been mobilized and used children in support roles or even as combatants. Children caught in the middle of operations have been killed and maimed and their homes and schools destroyed, raising concerns about compliance with international law. When responding to violent extremism, Member States should ensure that their rules of engagement take into account that children may be living in areas under the control of armed groups or may be used on front lines following their abduction or recruitment.

15. As noted in my Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism (see A/70/674), dated 24 December 2015, purely military and security approaches have not proved effective in addressing violent extremism. Violent extremism does not occur in a vacuum. It is necessary to identify and address its root causes and catalysts, such as protracted conflict without hope of resolution, political grievances, the alienation of communities, the lack of good governance, poverty and the lack of education and socioeconomic opportunities. Action is required by individual Member States, regional organizations and the broader international community, including by mobilizing resources, building resilience and strengthening protective environments for children. A new and compounding challenge is the regular use of propaganda on social media to recruit children and young people. I urge Member States to strengthen programmes to prevent the recruitment of children through social media.

16. The effective reintegration of children formerly associated with groups perpetrating violent extremism should be a priority. However, in Member States' response to violent extremism, children are often systematically treated as security threats rather than as victims, and are administratively detained or prosecuted for their alleged association. Depriving children of liberty following their separation is contrary not only to the best interests of the child, but also to the best interests of society as a whole. This approach further complicates efforts to reintegrate children, given that it separates them from their families and can also lead to the creation of community grievances.

C. Children displaced by armed conflict

17. Armed conflict has resulted in forced displacement, with an ever-growing number of people fleeing in search of protection. In the Syrian Arab Republic, more than 4.8 million people have fled the country and 6.5 million have been internally displaced since the beginning of the conflict; nearly half of them are children. In Nigeria, as at the end of December, more than 1.8 million people had been internally displaced, including in excess of 1 million children, and more than 200,000 were refugees in neighbouring countries. In South Sudan, some 200,000 civilians, mainly women and children, remained in United Nations sites for the protections of civilians at the end of 2015. In Gaza, 44,479 children remain displaced as a result of the escalation of hostilities in 2014.

18. Those figures represent a very small fraction of the total number of children displaced by conflict, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated from their

families and caregivers during displacement. Those children are at a high risk and were victims of grave violations inside and around camps or other areas where they sought refuge. It is noted herein that, in contexts such as South Sudan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, parties to conflict took advantage of the vulnerability of displaced and refugee populations to recruit children and commit other crimes, including sexual violence and abduction.

19. States of origin, transit and destination have a responsibility to ensure appropriate protection for displaced children and to avoid aggravating their vulnerability, including through equal access to health care, high-quality education and psychosocial support. The failure to accord priority to the rights and needs of children affected by armed conflict will only increase the cost of rebuilding society once peace has been achieved.

20. Conflict prevention must be the goal of the international community. Sustainable peace is the only way to reduce conflict-related displacement, and increased efforts should be made to identify long-term solutions that will reduce and mitigate the root causes of conflict. In the short term, action is urgently required to alleviate the plight of the many children currently displaced by armed conflict. I encourage Member States to respect the rights of displaced and refugee children and to provide them with the necessary support services, keeping in mind the best interests of the child.

III. Information on grave violations committed against children during armed conflict and progress made by parties on dialogue, action plans and other measures to halt and prevent violations against children

A. Situations on the agenda of the Security Council

Afghanistan

21. Children were disproportionately affected by the intensifying conflict in Afghanistan. The number of child casualties verified by the United Nations has risen by 14 per cent since 2014 and reached the highest number ever recorded. One in four civilian casualties in 2015 was a child.

22. The number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children more than doubled compared with 2014. A total of 116 cases (115 boys, 1 girl) were documented during the reporting period, of which 48 were verified. Thirteen verified recruitment cases were attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces: five to the Afghan Local Police; five to the Afghan National Police; and three to the Afghan National Army. The majority of verified cases were attributed to the Taliban (20) and other armed groups (15). The Taliban continued to recruit children for combat and suicide attacks. There is continuing concern about allegations of cross-border recruitment of children and of use of religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan for child recruitment and military training by the Taliban and other armed groups (see S/2015/336, para. 21).

23. As at 31 December, the Ministry of Justice reported that 214 boys had been detained in juvenile rehabilitation centres on charges relating to national security,

including association with armed groups. In addition, 166 detainees arrested as children were being held at the Parwan detention facility for security-related offences; 53 of those were under 18 years of age. I am concerned about children being held in a high-security facility for adults for extended periods without due process, and about reports of the consistent use of solitary confinement for children.

24. The United Nations verified 1,306 incidents resulting in 2,829 child casualties (733 killed, 2,096 injured) — an average of 53 children were killed or injured every week. Of the casualties, 42 per cent (339 killed, 850 injured) were attributed to armed groups, including the Taliban, groups affiliated with ISIL and Hezb-i-Islami, and 23 per cent (177 killed, 471 injured) to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias. A total of 55 child casualties were attributed to international forces, the majority of which were caused by air strikes (21 killed, 20 injured), and cross-border shelling (3 killed, 9 injured). A third of child casualties (937) could not be attributed to a specific party. The leading causes of child casualties remained ground engagements (55 per cent), improvised explosive device attacks (19 per cent) and explosive remnants of war (13 per cent). The number of casualties relating to air strikes by Afghan and international forces almost doubled in 2015.

25. The United Nations received 11 reports of sexual violence, affecting nine boys and six girls. One incident involving a boy recruited and sexually abused by the Taliban in the northern region was verified. Concerns remain regarding the cultural practice of *bachah-bazi* ("dancing boys"), which involves the sexual exploitation of boys by men in power, including Afghan National Defence and Security Forces commanders.

26. Attacks on schools and protected personnel continued to be verified, including the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel. Of 132 verified incidents, 82 were attributed to the Taliban, 13 to ISIL-affiliated groups, 11 to undetermined armed groups, 1 to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and 23 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias; 2 incidents could not be attributed to any party. The emergence of ISIL-affiliated groups in the east had an impact on access to education and led to the closure of 68 schools, affecting more than 48,751 children in Nangarhar Province.

27. Verified attacks on hospitals and health personnel (125) significantly increased compared with 2014. In the attacks, at least 63 health-care personnel, including vaccinators, were killed or injured, 66 abducted and 64 intimidated and assaulted. A total of 75 incidents were attributed to the Taliban; 14 to ISIL-affiliated groups; 1 to TTP; 19 to undetermined armed groups; 14 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias; and 1 to international forces. For example, 49 medical staff were killed or injured in an air strike by international forces on the Médecins sans frontières hospital in Kunduz on 3 October.

28. In a positive development, in May, the Government signed the Safe Schools Declaration, aimed at protecting education facilities from military use during conflict. The use of schools by parties to the conflict continued, however, with 24 cases attributed to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and 11 to armed groups (Taliban (4), ISIL-affiliated group (7)). The United Nations also verified 10 incidents of military use of hospitals.

29. The verified number of children abducted more than tripled compared with 2014. A total of 92 children (74 boys, 4 girls and 14 of unknown sex) were abducted in 23 incidents, including incidents linked to the killing of seven children and sexual violence against a child. The abductions of 69 children were attributed to the Taliban (two killed), 3 to ISIL-affiliated groups (all killed) and 12 to undetermined armed groups. An incident involving eight children remains unattributed.

30. The United Nations received reports of 93 incidents of denial of humanitarian access (75 verified). Humanitarian personnel were abducted (100), killed (9) and threatened and intimidated (14 incidents), while five humanitarian convoys were attacked. Of the verified incidents, 76 (78 per cent) were attributed to armed groups, including the Taliban, and 10 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias, while 7 cases could not be attributed.

31. The United Nations welcomes the measures taken by the Government in meeting its obligations under the action plan, including criminalizing underage recruitment by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the endorsement of national age assessment guidelines and the inauguration of three new child protection units within Afghan National Police recruitment centres, bringing the total to seven. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice granted the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan unimpeded access to all juvenile rehabilitation centres.

32. In February 2016, my Special Representative visited Afghanistan. She commended the strong commitment of the Government and the important progress made to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, and discussed gaps and challenges to be addressed. Critical elements are the nationwide expansion of child protection units in Afghan National Police recruitment centres, the implementation of national age assessment guidelines in all Afghan National Defence and Security Forces recruitment and a general prohibition on child recruitment and use in the Child Law. I am concerned, however, about the lack of oversight mechanisms for Afghan Local Police recruitment, especially in the light of allegations of informal recruitment of children. Reintegration programmes and alternatives for children are also important, given that poverty is a driver of recruitment. Regarding the deprivation of liberty of children on charges relating to national security, I urge the Government to consider alternatives to detention and ensure that children are always treated in accordance with their best interests and juvenile justice standards.

33. Further analysis of the six grave violations is provided in my country report on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, issued on 15 May 2015 (S/2015/336). The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict adopted its conclusions on Afghanistan in February 2016, and I urge all parties to take action to address the recommendations set out therein.

Central African Republic

34. There were significant political developments in the Central African Republic in 2015, including the holding of the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation in May, a constitutional referendum in November and the first round of presidential elections in December. A new outbreak of violence erupted in September between former Séléka elements, anti-balaka elements and members of the former Central African military, which critically affected children. A detailed account of the effects

of armed conflict in the country is available in my recent report to the Security Council, which covers the period from January 2011 to December 2015 (S/2016/133).

35. The United Nations documented 40 cases of child recruitment and use, more than half of which were by LRA (21) and over a quarter by the former Séléka faction, Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) (13). Children were used as combatants, messengers, informants and cooks. Girls were also used as sex slaves. In addition, the United Nations documented the presence of an undetermined number of children manning checkpoints and barricades alongside armed individuals reportedly sympathetic or affiliated to anti-balaka and former Séléka elements, when violence erupted in Bangui in September. On several occasions, suspected anti-balaka elements used children as shields as they fired at United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) forces. Furthermore, the military leader of a former Séléka faction, Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, acknowledged having 43 children in his group. The United Nations engaged with him for their release, but without further cooperation.

36. There was a fall in the number of documented child casualties compared with 2014, with 62 children killed and 185 maimed, mostly during the violence in September sparked by the beheading of a 16-year-old boy. The ensuing violence claimed the lives of 28 children and injured 31. Anti-balaka elements were responsible for killing 28 children and former Séléka factions for 8, while 26 children died in crossfire or in incidents involving explosive remnants of war.

37. Sexual violence remained prevalent, with 70 cases documented, although the number of verified cases significantly decreased compared with 2014. Incidents were mainly attributed to former Séléka factions, in particular UPC, but also to anti-balaka elements and armed individuals of Fulani origin. A small number of incidents were reported to the police, but did not result in investigation or prosecution.

38. In the context of already fragile education and health-care systems, 19 attacks on schools and 12 on hospitals were verified, the majority by anti-balaka and former Séléka elements (UPC and Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique factions). A nurse was killed in Bambari in March by anti-balaka elements who had accused her of spying. Two suspects were arrested and handed over to the police, but no action had been taken as at the time of writing (March 2016). Furthermore, 16 schools were used for military purposes, 14 of them by former Séléka factions. In a positive development, the Government signed the Safe Schools Declaration.

39. A total of 52 children were verified as having been abducted: 25 by LRA, 15 by anti-balaka elements and the remainder by unidentified armed men. More allegations involving LRA were received but could not be verified. While the children abducted by LRA were used as porters or looters or for sexual purposes, abductions by anti-balaka elements were mainly for ransom.

40. Humanitarian access remained a major concern, with 140 verified incidents affecting humanitarians. Unidentified armed individuals or alleged affiliates of anti-balaka and former Séléka elements, often for financial gain, systematically impeded the provision of humanitarian assistance.

41. The United Nations continued to engage with some former Séléka factions, local anti-balaka commanders and other armed groups. That interaction culminated

with the signing of an agreement by 10 armed groups on 5 May, on the margins of the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, to end and prevent the recruitment and use of, and other grave violations against, children. Since the agreement was signed, 1,446 children have been separated from armed groups and space has opened for the United Nations to discuss commitments to end grave violations, especially with a number of the former Séléka factions. With regard to the anti-balaka, the United Nations engaged with local commanders, which led to the separation of children.

42. In total, 2,679 children were separated from armed groups: almost 89 per cent from anti-balaka elements and 10 per cent from former Séléka elements. UNICEF and its partners developed community-based approaches to reintegrate the children.

43. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against children by MINUSCA military and police personnel were recorded, including four from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one each from Burundi, the Congo, Gabon and Morocco and two by unknown perpetrators. As at December, investigations were continuing regarding seven allegations, with one involving personnel from Morocco and one involving personnel from the Democratic Republic of the Congo found to be unsubstantiated. Three allegations were also reported against members of the Sangaris force and contingents of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic. Furthermore, many new allegations involving personnel of the Sangaris force and MINUSCA were received in 2016 and were being investigated at the time of writing (March 2016).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

44. The security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (Ituri, North Kivu and Tanganyika) remained volatile in 2015 and was marked by military operations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo — FARDC) against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI) and other armed groups. The situation also deteriorated owing to the activities of armed groups and intercommunal clashes. The United Nations verified 2,549 violations against children, a significant increase compared with 2014. Nearly 40 per cent were attributed to FDLR. Children took the opportunity of military operations to escape from armed groups, resulting in a spike in the number of separated children.

45. The United Nations verified the new recruitment of 488 children (26 girls), of whom 30 per cent were under 15 years of age when recruited. This is more than twice the number of documented cases in 2014. Of the recruitment and use, 89 per cent occurred in North Kivu, and almost half of the children were recruited by FDLR (219), followed by Raia Mutomboki (89), Nyatura (69) and other groups (111). In July, 10 boys who had been recruited in 2013 and 2014 were separated from FARDC and reported that they had participated in military operations in North Kivu in the year of their recruitment. The United Nations engaged with FARDC, which indicated that it had suspended the suspected commanding officers and initiated an investigation, which was continuing at the time of writing (March 2016).

46. FARDC handed over 139, and the Congolese National Police 8, children formerly associated with armed groups to the United Nations. Ten other children were handed over after they had been detained by FARDC, notwithstanding the two government directives prohibiting the holding of children for alleged association

with armed groups. Some had been detained for a few months, but one boy had allegedly been detained for more than a year. At the time of writing (March 2016), the United Nations had identified at least 22 children who were being held without charge in Angenga prison after being encountered in military operations.

47. At least 80 children were killed and 56 maimed, with most incidents occurring in North Kivu and Ituri. ADF (20), FRPI (19) and FDLR (14) were the main perpetrators among armed groups. A total of 29 children were killed and maimed by FARDC and 9 by the Congolese National Police. Fourteen casualties were attributed to military operations or clashes among armed groups and nine were the result of explosive remnants of war.

48. The United Nations verified 254 child victims of sexual violence. Armed groups were responsible for the majority of incidents, in particular FRPI (67), Raia Mutomboki (33) and Mayi Mayi Simba (27). FARDC was responsible for 68 cases, the Congolese National Police for 19 and the National Intelligence Agency for 2. A total of 42 FARDC and 11 Congolese National Police elements were arrested following the incidents.

49. Twenty-six attacks on schools (22) and hospitals (4) were verified. The Twa self-defence group destroyed 10 schools in Tanganyika Province in clashes with the Luba. The remaining attacks were perpetrated by Nyatura (4), FDLR (2) and other armed groups (5). Regarding hospitals, ADF was responsible for two attacks and LRA and FDLR for one each. Most notably, an attack by ADF on Eringeti hospital in Beni territory on 29 November resulted in at least 31 casualties.

50. Notwithstanding a directive issued in 2013 by the Ministry of Defence prohibiting the practice of military use of schools, 20 schools were used by FARDC. Following advocacy by the United Nations, however, 13 were vacated. Ten schools were also used by armed groups.

51. A total of 195 reports of abductions were received. Sixty-eight verified cases were attributed mainly to Raia Mutomboki, FRPI and ADF. Girls were reported to have been raped while in captivity, and some 40 per cent of the children are still missing. LRA continued to abduct children; 102 new reports were received in 2015.

52. Two cases of denial of humanitarian access by Raia Mutomboki were documented in Shabunda territory (South Kivu). In addition, at least 127 incidents of intimidation of and direct attacks on humanitarian organizations and staff were recorded in North Kivu.

53. Military pressure and radio messages encouraging children to escape contributed to 2,045 children being separated from armed groups, which is twice the number separated in the previous year. Children were separated from FDLR (891), but also from Raia Mutomboki, Nyatura, FRPI, Nduma Defence of Congo/Cheka and other armed groups. Ten boys were also separated from FARDC in 2015. Six Burundian boys allegedly recruited in a refugee camp in Rwanda were separated. A report released by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in November[2] demonstrated the plight of girls associated with armed groups. In 257 cases, children associated with armed groups were separated from FARDC bases (Kitona and Kamina) far from

[2] MONUSCO, "Invisible survivors: girls in armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 2009 to 2015", 25 November 2015.

where they had been encountered, which delayed and complicated family reunification. In response, the United Nations advocated adherence to agreed principles to separate children where they are encountered by FARDC.

54. Throughout 2015, the Government maintained its commitment to implementing the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2012, including through the work of the President's personal adviser on sexual violence and child recruitment. In September, the Minister of Defence endorsed a road map outlining pending activities for the full implementation of the action plan. To accelerate the process, three new provincial joint technical working groups were established. The United Nations provided technical support and screened more than 17,000 FARDC troops. However, it remains a concern that FARDC may not be able to identify minors without assistance, as was the case with the children identified by the United Nations in 2015. It is important that, as part of the implementation of the road map, the standard operating procedure on age assessment, drafted in August, be adopted and implemented country-wide.

55. Efforts continued by the Government to hold the perpetrators of grave violations accountable. At least 68 individuals, including high-ranking officers of FARDC and the Congolese National Police, were arrested, with 37 receiving sentences of up to 20 years' imprisonment for sexual violence against girls. Moreover, in August, an FARDC officer was arrested for the alleged recruitment and use of children. Seven leaders of armed groups were arrested on similar charges, including the former FRPI leader, Justin Matata Wanaloki, alias "Cobra Matata".

56. I encourage the Government to continue its efforts to implement the action plan by institutionalizing procedures, adopting and disseminating the standard operating procedure on age verification assessment and sustaining its commitment to combating impunity.

57. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of children involving members of MONUSCO military contingents from South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania were being investigated at the time of writing (March 2016). Two other incidents involving military personnel from Benin and South Africa were substantiated.

Iraq

58. Military operations against ISIL intensified, especially in the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din. The governorates of Baghdad and Diyala witnessed the main concentration of ISIL attacks. The impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure was devastating. My report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2015/852) provides information on the period from January 2011 to June 2015. Limited access, especially with the intensification of conflict, and fear of retaliation impeded the monitoring and reporting of grave violations. The figures presented below are considered to be underreported.

59. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 37 children (36 boys and 1 girl). Of the cases, 19 were attributed to ISIL (including 18 boys from Halabjah, Sulaymaniyah governorate), 6 to the Kurdish Workers Party and other Kurdish armed groups and 12 to groups under the umbrella of the popular mobilization forces. Cases of child recruitment by the popular mobilization forces, which since April 2015 have been under the authority of the Prime Minister, included the coercion of eight boys to

go to a military training camp and the recruitment of four boys who were killed while fighting ISIL in Bayji, Salah al-Din governorate. Another 174 incidents of child recruitment (169 by ISIL, 3 by the Kurdish Workers Party and 2 by the popular mobilization forces) were reported but could not be verified. Recruitment by ISIL was reported in the Anbar and Ninawa governorates, and child soldiers were portrayed in social media, including as executioners.

60. As at December, at least 314 children (256 boys and 58 girls), including 23 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, remained in detention on charges under the Anti-Terrorism Law (2005), including for alleged association with armed groups.

61. The killing and maiming of children remained the most reported violation. The United Nations recorded 268 incidents, resulting in 809 child casualties (338 killed and 471 injured). Of those incidents, 152 were verified, including the killing of 203 children (125 boys, 32 girls and 46 of unknown sex) and injury of 314 (182 boys, 96 girls and 36 of unknown sex). The majority (74 per cent) of child casualties were recorded in the second half of 2015, as military operations intensified in the Anbar, Ninawa and Salah al-Din governorates. A total of 63 per cent of casualties occurred during military operations and engagements involving ISIL, the Iraqi security forces, including the popular mobilization forces and the Peshmerga, tribal elements and the international coalition against ISIL. There were 76 recorded improvised explosive device attacks targeting public areas and Iraqi security personnel.

62. The United Nations received reports of sexual violence against girls, in particular against members of the Yezidi community and other minority groups, in ISIL-controlled areas. Specific cases of rape and sexual violence remained difficult to verify, however.

63. The United Nations documented 90 incidents of attacks on schools and education personnel (68 verified). The majority (62) resulted from continuing fighting in Anbar, and schools were targeted by improvised explosive devices in three incidents in Baghdad and Diyala. Teachers and students were directly targeted in 24 incidents. On 9 December, ISIL tortured and killed a female teacher in Ninawa for refusing to use the ISIL curriculum. Three schools in the governorates of Anbar and Salah al-Din were used for military purposes (two by ISIL and one by Iraqi security forces).

64. Ten attacks on health facilities were reported, of which seven were attributed to air strikes in Anbar. In addition, 26 attacks on medical personnel were recorded, with 18 staff killed, 10 abducted and 2 injured in the governorates of Baghdad, Diyala, Ninawa and Salah al-Din.

65. The United Nations received many reports of abduction of children, primarily by ISIL. In two incidents in June and September, more than 1,000 children were reportedly abducted by ISIL from Mosul district. In another nine incidents, 12 children (10 boys and 2 girls) were allegedly abducted by unknown perpetrators owing to family affiliations.

66. Incidents were documented of internally displaced persons being prevented from fleeing conflict to access safety and basic services. For example, in December, 1,600 internally displaced persons from Anbar were stopped from crossing the Bzeibiz bridge between Anbar and Baghdad and some were abducted, reportedly by elements of the popular mobilization forces.

67. In collaboration with the United Nations, the Kurdistan Regional Government established a task force on justice for children to follow up on children in conflict with the law, including those detained on charges relating to national security. I welcome the efforts by the Government to identify preventive measures to counter child recruitment by ISIL, but am concerned about continued reports of recruitment and use of children by the popular mobilization forces, which now fall under the Government's responsibility. I urge the Government to put in place age verification and screening, and to criminalize and ensure accountability for child recruitment and use.

Israel and State of Palestine

68. In 2015, the situation was marked by heightened tensions that translated into widespread violence, especially in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the second half of the year. The detrimental impact of grave violations and an increasingly violent and oppressive environment continued to mark the lives of children. Palestinian and Israeli children were affected by the prevailing situation of military occupation, conflict and the blockade.

69. In 2015, 30 Palestinian children (25 boys and 5 girls) were killed and at least 1,735 injured (1,687 boys and 48 girls), predominantly in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

70. A total of 27 Palestinian children (23 boys and 4 girls) were killed in the West Bank, almost double the number killed in 2014. Most of the killings took place in the fourth quarter of 2015. Twenty-five deaths were attributed to Israeli forces, one to Israeli settlers and one to both Israeli forces and settlers. The number of Palestinian children injured also increased, predominantly as a result of clashes with Israeli forces and military-led operations. In the fourth quarter of 2015, 121 stabbing attacks against Israelis were carried out by Palestinians, including minors. From October to December, 14 Palestinian children involved in or suspected of stabbing attacks were shot dead by Israeli forces. I have repeatedly condemned the stabbings and other attacks. In addition, a number of the incidents raise concerns about the excessive use of force and unlawful killing, given that there are indications that the children posed no imminent or immediate threat to life that would justify the use of lethal force. For example, on 25 October, a 17-year-old girl was stopped at a checkpoint in Hebron, searched and shot at least five times. The Israeli authorities alleged that she had attempted to stab a police officer, yet an eyewitness stated that she had held her hands in the air and had posed no threat.

71. Violence by Israeli settlers and related incidents involving Israeli forces resulted in the injury of 54 Palestinian children (45 boys and 9 girls), with 20 cases of direct injury by settlers. An 18-month-old Palestinian boy was killed by Israeli settlers in an arson attack on 31 July that also claimed the lives of his parents and seriously injured his 4-year-old brother. Two Israelis, including a minor, were charged in relation to the crime.

72. A total of 13 Israeli children (9 boys and 4 girls) were injured by Palestinians. An Israeli girl who had sustained critical injuries in 2013 in a car accident involving stone-throwing by Palestinians died of complications. Furthermore, it was reported that a 17-year-old Israeli male had been shot dead in November.

73. In Gaza, three Palestinian children were killed by Israeli forces. Two boys were killed near the fence with Israel and one girl was killed in an air strike. In addition, 65 boys were injured, predominantly in the access-restricted areas along the fence with Israel and at sea.

74. Limited information is available about the recruitment or use of children. The Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades reportedly ran a military camp for 25,000 children and young people between 15 and 21 years of age in Gaza from 25 July to 5 August. On 30 August, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine reportedly held a graduation ceremony during a camp for girls, which included training in weapons.

75. An increased number of Palestinian children were arrested and detained by Israeli forces and prosecuted by juvenile military courts in the West Bank. In East Jerusalem, 860 Palestinian children were arrested, including 136 between 7 and 11 years of age, under the age of criminal responsibility. The monthly average number of children held in Israeli custody, according to the Israel Prison Service, increased by 15 per cent compared with 2014. A worrisome development was the recommencement of administrative detention of children, which had not been used in East Jerusalem since 2000 and elsewhere in the West Bank since 2011. Between October and December, six children were placed in administrative detention by the Israeli authorities. The United Nations and partners continued to document cases of ill-treatment of children by Israeli forces during their arrest and detention in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

76. In the West Bank, attacks on schools and protected personnel, and a pervasive environment of violence, harassment and intimidation, continued to have an impact on children's access to education. The United Nations documented 283 incidents relating to education, including 96 cases of schools coming under fire during military-led operations and clashes, 46 attacks and threats of violence against students and teachers by Israeli security forces and settlers, and 62 instances of interference with education owing to the closure of schools or the arrest and detention of staff and students. In Gaza, of the 262 schools and 274 kindergartens damaged or destroyed during the hostilities in 2014, 96 per cent of non-United Nations schools, all United Nations schools and 65 per cent of kindergartens have been repaired or rebuilt through the assistance of humanitarian organizations and donors.

77. Ten incidents of interference with health care were documented in the West Bank, with half involving the Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem. Incidents included the forced closure of clinics, search-and-arrest operations and Israeli security forces entering hospitals to obtain files and interrogate medical staff, resulting in the disruption of medical services. In addition, the Palestine Red Crescent Society reported that more than 131 paramedics and volunteers had been wounded and 76 ambulances damaged while undertaking their work in the West Bank and that access by medical teams to sick and wounded persons had been denied or delayed by Israeli security forces on 70 occasions.

78. In my previous report (A/69/926-S/2015/409), I urged Israel to take concrete and immediate steps to protect children, schools and hospitals, in particular by ensuring accountability for alleged violations. Of the 190 cases of alleged violations of international humanitarian law during the hostilities in Gaza in 2014 referred to the Israeli Defense Forces Fact-Finding Assessments Mechanism, the Israeli Military Advocate General has indicted three soldiers for looting and theft. Investigations into

numerous incidents, including the killing of four children on a beach in Gaza City on 16 July 2014, were closed without criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

79. I am concerned that actions have been taken by the Government of Israel in 2015 that further restrict the rights of Palestinians, including children. For example, the Knesset passed temporary amendments to the Penal Code to increase the maximum sentence for throwing stones to 20 years, and the State Prosecutor directed that all prosecutors should seek the detention of suspects charged with stone-throwing until the end of legal proceedings. I also reiterate my concerns regarding the practice of punitive demolitions of the homes of Palestinians accused of attacking Israelis, which have rendered their families and neighbours, including children, homeless.

Lebanon

80. Children were affected by intensified clashes in the Bekaa governorate and the Ein el-Hillweh Palestine refugee camp, bombings in Tripoli and Beirut and violence along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic and the Blue Line with Israel.

81. The United Nations continued to document cases of recruitment and use of children by local and foreign armed groups, including of boys between 15 and 17 years of age who were sent to the Syrian Arab Republic. The majority of incidents were related to the Nusrah Front; however, children were reportedly also recruited by other armed groups, including Hizbullah, supporting the Syrian government forces. Furthermore, the United Nations documented the recruitment and use of boys and girls between 15 and 17 years of age by Palestinian armed factions and other armed groups within Lebanon. Reportedly, boys were used to man checkpoints or as guards, while girls were used in support roles.

82. As noted in my previous report (A/69-926-S/2015/409), I am concerned that children are held in pretrial detention under military jurisdiction on charges relating to national security. Fifteen boys (between 14 and 17 years of age at the time of their arrest) were still detained as at the end of 2015.

83. The United Nations verified 14 cases of child casualties relating to explosive remnants of war in southern Lebanon (2 killed, 9 injured), stray bullets during Hizbullah mourning ceremonies (1 killed, 1 injured) and crossfire (1 injured).

84. During violence between armed factions in the Ein el-Hillweh refugee camp in August, six United Nations schools and two medical facilities were damaged by crossfire and four United Nations schools were used by armed elements.

85. I commend the Government on its intensified efforts to implement the workplan to prevent and respond to the association of children with armed violence in Lebanon, signed in August 2014. I once again urge Lebanon to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which it signed in 2002.

Libya

86. Protracted fighting continued in Benghazi, and sporadic armed clashes occurred in Ajdabiya, Darnah, Kufrah, Sabha, Sirte, Tripoli and the oil crescent. Groups pledging allegiance to ISIL expanded and gained territory in central Libya.

Access for monitoring continued to be restricted by insecurity, and United Nations international staff were located outside the country.

87. The recruitment and use of children by armed groups was reported. For example, groups affiliated with ISIL reportedly operated training camps south of Sirte, with a graduation ceremony for 85 children under 16 years of age reportedly held in December. It has been reported that children have been exposed to sexual violence during their association with armed groups.

88. At least 60 children were reportedly casualties of indiscriminate shelling of residential areas, air strikes, suicide bombings and crossfire, the majority in Benghazi. Summary executions of children were also reported, with groups affiliated with ISIL allegedly beheading a 17-year-old boy in Hawarah in May.

89. In Benghazi, 40 schools were reportedly damaged or destroyed, including through indiscriminate shelling. The United Nations also documented a case of military use of a school as a detention facility by the Darnah Mujahideen Shura Council. Attacks on hospitals and medical personnel continued. The Benghazi medical centre was shelled at least four times, and four medical personnel were reportedly killed on duty in an ambulance on 6 May. The abduction and killing of medical personnel by armed groups, including groups affiliated to Operation Karamah, was documented in Ajdabiya, Benghazi and Darnah.

90. In the context of the breakdown of law and order, there was a rise in the abduction of children by armed groups, militias and criminal organizations. For example, the body of a 16-year-old boy, reportedly abducted by militias affiliated with Operation Karamah, was found in Benghazi in December.

91. In June, an armed group believed to belong to the Magarha tribe abducted seven staff of a Libyan humanitarian organization; the whereabouts of the abductees remains unknown.

92. The United Nations engaged with the Constitution Drafting Assembly to include guarantees of children's rights in the draft constitution. I welcome the decision of the Zintan Municipal Council of February 2016 to release and reintegrate child soldiers, and look forward to its implementation with the support of UNICEF.

Mali

93. Notwithstanding the peace accord signed by the Government, the Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad in May and June, clashes between the parties in northern Mali continued in the middle of 2015. The period was also marked by an increase in violent extremist and asymmetric attacks. In total, 109 verified and 128 unverified grave violations were reported.

94. A total of 127 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups were received, with 30 verified. In addition, 27 cases of recruitment and use of children by the Groupe d'autodefense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés were verified in March 2016 in Ineggar, Gao region, and 47 other alleged cases were received. As at 31 December, of the 32 children arrested on security charges, 4 remained in detention in Bamako and Koulikoro. The United Nations continued to collaborate with the Malian authorities to ensure the implementation of the handover protocol signed in 2013. In addition, it documented cases of 14 children held by armed groups.

95. The United Nations verified the killing of 12 children and the maiming of 39 during rocket attacks and crossfire, as well as by improvised explosive device attacks and explosive remnants of war. While the identification of the perpetrators was not always possible, CMA was reportedly involved in at least two attacks. In one incident, two boys were lynched, dismembered and burned by a mob on suspicion of being associated with armed groups and participating in an attack.

96. A total of 22 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children were verified, comprising 3 by the Malian defence and security forces, 1 by the Platform and 18 by unknown perpetrators.

97. Four attacks and threats of attacks on schools and protected personnel were verified, including one by CMA and one by the Front de libération du Macina.[3] Following the killing of a village leader by the latter group in Dogo, Mopti region, reportedly for seeking the authorities' support after he had been told to close secular schools, the group threatened teachers in six local communes, leading to the closure of 93 schools. The number of schools used for military purposes by armed groups had dropped from 20 in 2014 to 7 by December.

98. The operational environment remained extremely volatile and targeted attacks against humanitarian personnel and facilities contributed to the disruption of the delivery of assistance. In a verified incident, CMA forced an international medical non-governmental organization supporting two health centres in the Timbuktu region to withdraw.

99. In the light of increasing threats to education, the United Nations initiated a dialogue with the Ministry of Education on the protection of schools. Efforts to engage CMA on ending and preventing grave violations against children continued and steps were taken to develop an action plan with the Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad. In October, the United Nations also assisted the Malian authorities in developing a separation and reintegration strategy for children. I encourage the Malian authorities and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the peace agreement to dedicate attention to the rights and specific needs of children.

Myanmar

100. Conflict continued in Kachin and Shan States and the south-east between government armed forces (Tatmadaw) and armed groups. On 15 October, the Government and eight armed groups, including four listed parties, signed a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

101. The United Nations received reports of 217 cases of recruitment, of which 95 were verified. Five verified incidents took place in 2015, with three attributed to the Tatmadaw (those recruited were subsequently released) and two to the Kachin Independence Army. Twenty-six incidents verified in 2015 had taken place in 2014. Furthermore, the United Nations received seven reports of the use of children in support functions by the Tatmadaw, including two verified cases in Rakhine State. The Government indicated that action had been taken against 382 military personnel, including 73 officers, for failing to adhere to recruitment procedures. A civilian was also sentenced to a year's imprisonment for aiding underage

[3] The Front de libération du Macina is an armed group formed in January 2015. Attacks in the central and northern regions have been attributed to it.

recruitment. Credible information indicates that children were recruited and used by armed groups; however, five reported incidents could not be verified owing to limited access to the areas. Reports of recruitment involved the Karen National Liberation Army, the Kachin Independence Army, the Shan State Army-South and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army in Kachin, Kayin and Shan States.

102. The United Nations documented three children held in military detention. Two were released after notification to the Tatmadaw and the other was returned to his regiment pending age verification. In addition, three children were reportedly detained at the battalion level and subsequently discharged.

103. The United Nations documented 37 incidents of killing and maiming (25 killed and 50 injured), of which 23 were verified and which resulted in the killing of 15 children and injury of 37. More than half of the verified cases were related to landmines and explosive remnants of war (10 killed and 24 injured).

104. The United Nations verified three cases of sexual violence against girls, aged between 5 and 10 years, by Tatmadaw soldiers. In a grievous case, an 8-year-old girl was raped by a soldier and died after being taken to hospital. The perpetrators were court-martialled for being absent from duty and intoxicated, and two were convicted of rape by civilian courts.

105. The United Nations received 11 reports of attacks on schools. Three verified incidents were attributed to the Tatmadaw, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army and an unknown armed group. Six verified cases of military use of schools were attributed to the Tatmadaw.

106. Five incidents of abduction were verified, with three leading to the disappearance of 11 children, which were attributed to the Tatmadaw, and two incidents involving three children were attributed to the Kachin Independence Army. Additional reports of abduction by armed groups in Kachin, northern Shan and Rakhine States, including for recruitment and use, could not be verified owing to access restrictions.

107. The United Nations received two reports of humanitarian personnel being caught in crossfire during engagement between the Tatmadaw and armed groups. Humanitarian access to areas outside government control in Kachin and Shan States was reduced compared with 2014, owing to limited government authorization.

108. Positive steps continued to be taken by the Government to advance the implementation of the joint action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw, including training on age assessment in recruitment centres, increased access to military battalions and units for monitoring missions and monthly case review meetings with the United Nations for the verification of suspected child recruits. In 2015, 146 former child soldiers, including 28 still under 18 years of age, were released and reintegrated into their families and communities.

109. My Special Representative visited Myanmar in July. While acknowledging the progress made, she noted that gaps remained in the systematic prevention of and accountability for the recruitment and use of children. Criminalizing recruitment and use by both military personnel and civilians is critical. The passage of the revised Child Law, including a chapter on children and armed conflict and a corresponding penalties section, would be highly important. The enforcement of existing accountability mechanisms also needs to be strengthened for all grave

violations, including through legal clarity to ensure consistency in decisions, improved witness protection and follow-up of cases in civilian courts.

110. In September, Myanmar signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. I strongly encourage its ratification.

111. My Special Representative engaged in dialogue with three armed groups listed in the annexes to the present report, to encourage the development of action plans to address the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations. The United Nations has pursued further dialogue with these groups, and one listed party, the Karenni National Progressive Party/Karenni Army, is ready to sign an action plan. I urge the Government to allow the signing and implementation of action plans with listed armed groups, which is a critical component of its commitment to end the recruitment and use of children throughout Myanmar, in line with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the commitment made by signing the Optional Protocol.

Somalia

112. The period saw increased attacks by Al-Shabaab on the Somali security forces, government officials and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), in addition to inter-clan clashes. In July, AMISOM and the Somali National Army resumed their offensive against Al-Shabaab. The national forces of Ethiopia and Kenya also conducted military operations. The situation resulted in a spike in the number of grave violations against children, with an increase of almost 50 per cent compared with 2014.

113. The recruitment and use of 903 children was documented, with 60 per cent of the cases (555) attributed to Al-Shabaab. In December, around 150 children were reportedly abducted for recruitment purposes from madrasas by Al-Shabaab in the Bay region. Of those cases, 26 (all boys) were verified by the United Nations. The Somali National Army also recruited a high number of children (218), who were used for various tasks, such as manning checkpoints. Recruitment was also attributed to clan militias (68), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (40) and Galmudug forces (17).

114. An increase in the detention of children for association with armed groups was documented, with 365 cases. The vast majority of children were detained by the Somali National Army (346), but also by Jubaland forces (11), Galmudug forces (6) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (2). Twenty-four boys were detained by AMISOM and later released. In a positive development, following engagement and advocacy by the United Nations, 79 children formerly associated with Al-Shabaab who had been held in rehabilitation centres were handed over to United Nations-supported non-governmental organization partners. At the time of writing (March 2016), however, dozens of children were reported to have taken part in an Al-Shabaab attack on Puntland and Galmudug and had been detained by the regional authorities.

115. A total of 474 incidents of killing and maiming were documented, affecting 753 children, and attributed to unknown armed elements (259), the Somali National Army (144), Al-Shabaab (138), clan militias (123), AMISOM (60), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (3) and other regional forces (8). Most incidents were related to indiscriminate gunfire or improvised explosive devices. The United Nations also documented six cases of children being executed by Al-Shabaab. Most incidents

attributed to AMISOM were caused by indiscriminate shooting in response to attacks by Al-Shabaab and during Operation Juba Corridor. For example, eight children were killed in two incidents in Marka district, Shabelle Hoose region, in July. In addition, 18 children were killed on 21 July in an air strike on a madrasa in Baardheere district.

116. The United Nations documented 164 incidents of sexual violence affecting 174 children, with the majority committed by clan militias (56), unknown armed elements (54), the Somali National Army (43), Al-Shabaab (15) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a and AMISOM (2 each). Eighteen cases of forced marriage by parties to conflict were also documented.

117. Attacks on 24 schools and five hospitals were documented. Al-Shabaab committed 15 attacks on schools, the Somali National Army and allied militias were responsible for 4 attacks, clan militias and unknown armed elements were responsible for 2 each and unidentified air forces were responsible for 1 attack, as mentioned above. Attacks on hospitals were committed by AMISOM (two) and Al-Shabaab, clan militias and the Somali National Army (one each). The attacks by AMISOM involved the looting of medicines. In addition, two schools were used by the Somali National Army, including one in the Shabelle Hoose region, which was vacated following engagement by the United Nations.

118. A pattern of abduction was observed. Numbers spiked compared with 2014. A total of 458 boys and 65 girls were abducted, with nearly 95 per cent by Al-Shabaab (492), but also by clan militias (14). Abductions were often used as a tactic for recruitment, but also for the purpose of sexual violence, including forced marriage. For example, parents reported the abduction of 45 children by Al-Shabaab from a madrasa in the Juba Dhexe region in August.

119. Twelve incidents of denial of humanitarian access by clan militias (seven), the Somali National Army (three), Al-Shabaab and unknown armed elements were reported. Humanitarian access to children remained extremely challenging and United Nations staff were targeted. Seventeen humanitarian staff were killed in 2015, including four UNICEF staff in a suicide attack by Al-Shabaab.

120. Regarding separation, UNICEF supported the reintegration of 749 children through community-based programmes. The United Nations also provided technical support to the Child Protection Unit of the Somali National Army. Joint screening exercises were conducted and 36 children were separated from militias in Kismaayo, as part of a vetting process before their integration into the Somali National Army. Efforts to provide the separated children with assistance were continuing at the time of writing (March 2016). In another positive development, the Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 1 October. I am, however, particularly concerned by the continuing recruitment and use of children and high numbers of Somali National Army child detainees. I call upon the Government to immediately separate all children from the Somali National Army in adherence with the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2012 and to comply with international juvenile justice standards regarding detention.

121. The United Nations has engaged with AMISOM on the alarming numbers of killing and maiming of children committed by its forces. I urge the African Union and the troop-contributing countries to take all measures necessary to prevent

violations and ensure the protection of children, as well as ensure accountability by undertaking prompt and independent investigations.

South Sudan

122. Conflict continued throughout the country, with intense clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A in Opposition) and their allied militias, primarily in Unity and Upper Nile States. A peace agreement was signed in August, but fighting continued, with mass displacement of civilians and severe repercussions on children. A total of 1,051 incidents affecting 28,788 children were documented, with 601 incidents in Unity State alone.

123. The United Nations verified 159 incidents of recruitment and use, affecting 2,596 children. Nearly 70 per cent were attributed to SPLA (110), other government security forces and allied forces, including the Cobra faction of the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army, which was integrated into SPLA in 2015. Recruitment and use was also perpetrated by SPLM/A in Opposition (19), Johnson Olony's armed group (11), the Arrow Boys (4) and the White Army (3). Children wearing military uniforms were spotted throughout the country, especially in the greater Upper Nile region, where they were used in direct hostilities and support roles. First-hand reports were received of children being ordered to kill civilians and loot properties in Unity State. Girls reported being gang-raped and used for sexual purposes. According to the United Nations in the Sudan, some 400 South Sudanese children were also recruited by SPLM/A in Opposition from the Kharasana refugee camp, Western Kordofan, in October.

124. The United Nations verified 131 incidents of killing and 59 of maiming affecting 480 and 128 children, respectively, a sharp increase compared with 2014. The majority were attributed to SPLA (160), including in Unity State, where soldiers and allied militias reportedly shot at and burned houses with children inside. Incidents were also attributed to the South Sudan National Police Service, SPLM/A in Opposition, Johnson Olony's armed group and other parties to conflict. Moreover, seven children were killed and maimed in four incidents in United Nations sites for the protection of civilians during exchanges of fire between SPLA and SPLM/A in Opposition. Explosive remnants of war also caused child casualties. A cross-border incident involving SPLA that killed six children and maimed five was documented by the United Nations in the Sudan.

125. A total of 103 incidents of sexual violence affecting 430 children were verified and attributed to SPLA and other government security forces. Most incidents were documented in Unity State. Boys were reportedly castrated and sexually mutilated, while girls who resisted rape were killed.

126. Ten attacks on schools by SPLA were verified. They entailed destruction, damage, looting or the recruitment of children. In an incident in Upper Nile State, 36 children were rounded up by Johnson Olony's armed group, a militia aligned at the time with SPLA, during an SPLA recruitment exercise. They were later released. Eleven attacks on hospitals and health facilities were also verified, with nine attributed to SPLA and two to SPLM/A in Opposition.

127. As at the end of December, 25 schools were being used for military purposes by SPLA and other government security forces (22) and SPLM/A in Opposition (1).

Thirty-six schools were vacated in 2015, mainly through advocacy by the United Nations and joint verifications with SPLA.

128. There was a dramatic upsurge in the number of incidents of abduction, with 79 verified incidents affecting 1,596 children. The main perpetrators were SPLA (67), the Arrow Boys (5) and SPLM/A in Opposition (4). The largest number of abductions was documented in Unity State. Most children were abducted for recruitment and use. Testimonies of rape while in captivity were also received.

129. A total of 277 incidents of denial of humanitarian access were verified and included attacks on personnel, destruction of compounds and interference in the delivery of assistance.

130. The Cobra faction of the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army released 1,755 children in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area following advocacy by the United Nations. Children joined reintegration programmes and received support, but some boys were reportedly rerecruited. Since the group's integration into SPLA, the United Nations has been working with the SPLA Child Protection Unit to release all children.

131. Child protection provisions were included in the peace agreement signed in August, but United Nations engagement with the parties to conflict yielded few results. Other commitments to protect children were forthcoming, however, and, in January, South Sudan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On 26 December, SPLM/A in Opposition signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children. I am, however, deeply concerned at the scale of violations affecting children and, in line with my call during my visit in February 2016, I urge the leaders of South Sudan to abide by their responsibilities to protect children. I also call upon all parties to turn their multiple commitments into action by stopping the violations against children and releasing the thousands of children from their ranks.

Sudan

Three areas: Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei

132. Clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) continued in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and attacks against civilians were reported. The most recent round of peace talks between the two parties, convened in November, produced little progress. Intercommunal violence also occurred, including in Abyei. In addition, the period featured activities by armed groups along the border with South Sudan. Owing to access limitations, the United Nations was unable to verify allegations and figures may be underreported.

133. The United Nations documented four cases of recruitment and use of children by the Sudanese Armed Forces. As noted in my previous report (A/69/926-S/2015/409), cross-border activities by armed groups continued and two boys were recruited by SPLM-N from refugee settlements in South Sudan.

134. The United Nations documented 28 incidents of killing and maiming, mostly perpetrated by the Sudanese Armed Forces (16) and SPLM-N (6), affecting 43 and 38 children, respectively. Most incidents were caused by attacks on civilians by government forces and SPLM-N, aerial bombardment, shelling and crossfire. Two

were also the result of tribal clashes and explosive remnants of war. In addition, the United Nations documented the killing and maiming of four girls in a Sudanese Armed Forces aerial bombardment in South Sudan.

135. The rapes of four girls and one boy by Sudanese Armed Forces elements and aligned militias were documented. Sexual violence against children remained a grave concern and the numbers are believed to be underreported owing to a lack of access.

136. Seven incidents of attacks on schools (two), hospitals (three) and protected personnel (two) were attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces (two), SPLM-N (two) and unknown perpetrators. Two incidents occurred during clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLM-N. For example, on 20 January, a hospital operated by Médecins sans frontières in the Nuba mountains was reportedly bombed by the Sudanese Armed Forces. A medical staff member and a teacher were reportedly killed in April in Western Kordofan by SPLM-N.

137. The United Nations documented the abduction of eight children, including five in Abyei, that occurred during Misseriya attacks on Ngok Dinka villages in January and March. The children were released and reunited with their families following engagement by the United Nations. Three other boys were reportedly abducted by SPLM-N, including two in South Sudan.

138. The Government continued to restrict humanitarian access, resulting in an estimated 165,000 children being deprived of immunization.

Darfur

139. The period witnessed continued confrontations between government security forces and armed groups, especially in the Jebel Marra area, which led to significant displacement. The situation, exacerbated by aerial bombardment and increasingly deadly intertribal clashes, resulted in grave violations against children.

140. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified the recruitment of four boys by the Sudanese Armed Forces in West Darfur, including one who reportedly participated in fighting between the Abbas faction of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Armed Forces in June. More allegations were received involving the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Government's Rapid Support Forces, which could not be verified. In addition, the United Nations documented the recruitment of six children by JEM from refugee settlements in Unity State, South Sudan. During her visit in March 2016, my Special Representative was given access to 21 children detained by the National Intelligence and Security Service since April and August 2015 for their alleged association with JEM. The children had allegedly been recruited in Southern Kordofan and South Sudan and used in combat in Darfur and South Sudan. My Special Representative advocated further access by the United Nations to the children and their release and reunification with their families.

141. Killing and maiming accounted for the majority of verified violations (196). Some 50 per cent of the children were killed (21) and maimed (74) by explosive remnants of war, but casualties also resulted from indiscriminate shooting, intercommunal clashes in East Darfur and aerial bombardments. A number of cases in restricted areas could not be documented.

142. Forty-five incidents of sexual violence affecting 60 children, including a boy, were verified and attributed to unidentified armed men (35), militias (13), the Rapid Support Forces (5), armed nomads (3), the Sudanese Armed Forces (2) and the police and JEM-Wing for Peace (1 each). In addition, the United Nations in South Sudan documented three incidents by JEM affecting 12 children.

143. Thirteen schools were damaged or looted by the Central Reserve Police and the Rapid Support Forces, but also during Sudanese Armed Forces aerial bombardments and intertribal clashes. All but one of the incidents took place in the eastern Jebel Marra. In two additional incidents, school personnel were threatened by elements of the Rapid Support Forces. Two attacks on hospitals and protected personnel were attributed to the Rapid Support Forces and the Central Reserve Police.

144. Humanitarian access, in particular to Jebel Marra, remained heavily restricted, which impeded efforts to reach affected communities, including children.

145. The country task force on reporting and monitoring engaged with armed groups and a command order prohibiting the recruitment and use of children was issued by JEM in September. In addition, my Special Representative met the leaders of JEM, the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid in Austria in May, in consultations organized by the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution. The leaders of the groups issued a joint statement with a commitment to stop and prevent grave violations against children. Lastly, in June SPLM-N signed Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict.

146. In March 2016, my Special Representative visited the Sudan and witnessed the signing of an action plan by the Government to end and prevent child recruitment and use in its security forces. I welcome that step and count on the Government to ensure the swift and full implementation of the action plan.

147. The country task force on monitoring and reporting provided technical support to government personnel and local communities through awareness-raising, the development of referral pathways and community-based child protection networks. Although impunity for grave violations continued to be a concern, there was progress, with arrests being made for sexual violence and the killing and maiming of children. I call upon the Government to ensure accountability for all grave violations.

Syrian Arab Republic

148. The conflict was marked by increasing indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings, especially in the second half of the year, and the proliferation of parties involved, including international forces. Besiegement of areas continued to be used as a tactic of war. On 27 February 2016, a cessation of hostilities agreement allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance to previously unreached areas. Owing to the increasingly constrained monitoring environment, the figures below do not reflect the full scale of grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict.

149. A total of 362 cases of recruitment and use of children were verified and attributed to ISIL (274), the Free Syrian Army and affiliated groups (62), Liwa' al-Tawhid (11), popular committees (5), Kurdish People's Protection Units (4), Ahrar al-Sham (3), the Nusrah Front (2) and the Army of Islam (1). Of the verified cases, 56 per cent involved children under 15 years of age, a significant increase

compared with 2014. The payment of salaries and ideology continued to be major influencing factors.

150. The massive recruitment and use of children by ISIL continued. The United Nations verified the existence of centres in rural Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr and rural Raqqah that provided military training to at least 124 boys between 10 and 15 years of age. Verification of the use of child foreign fighters increased significantly, with 18 cases of children as young as 7 years of age. The use of children as child executioners was reported and appeared in video footage.

151. The United Nations also verified the recruitment and use of children as young as 9 years of age by the Free Syrian Army, and the recruitment of 11 Syrian refugee children from neighbouring countries by Liwa' al-Tawhid. While cases became increasingly difficult to verify, the Kurdish People's Protection Units continued to recruit boys and girls as young as 14 years of age for combat roles, with pressure and coercion by communities reportedly a factor.

152. Recruitment and use by pro-Government groups was verified, with five cases of boys being recruited by the Popular Committee of Tallkalakh (Homs) to work as guards and conduct patrols. In addition, there were allegations of the use of children by government forces to man checkpoints.

153. The Government continued to detain children for their alleged association with armed opposition groups, with 36 cases verified. In 28 of those cases, the children were tortured, and one incident resulted in the child's death in detention. Pro-Government groups continued to deprive children of liberty for alleged association with opposition groups, with three cases attributed to the Popular Committee of Bludan. There were also five cases of ISIL depriving children of liberty owing to their association with parties to conflict.

154. Air strikes, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and objects, and complex attacks were the primary causes of killing and maiming of children. The United Nations verified 591 cases of children killed (269 boys, 106 girls and 196 of unknown sex) and 555 injured (203 boys, 128 girls and 224 of unknown sex), attributed to government forces and international forces supporting the Government (585), ISIL (142), the Nusrah Front (23), other armed groups (168), the international coalition against ISIL (7), the Kurdish People's Protection Units (2) and unknown parties (219). Mortar, rocket and suicide attacks on government-controlled areas resulted in the killing and maiming of 275 children (77 boys, 93 girls and 105 of unknown sex), attributed to ISIL (79), the Nusrah Front (14) and other armed groups (167). Aerial attacks and shelling of civilian areas by government forces and international forces supporting the Government killed and injured 531 children, including 133 from indiscriminate barrel bombs.

155. There was a significant increase in the number of verified cases of children killed and maimed as a result of their association with armed groups, including while participating in combat. Owing to the large numbers of children used by ISIL, at least 148 children were killed in ISIL military areas targeted by air strikes by government forces, international forces supporting the Government and the international coalition. ISIL and the Nusrah Front continued to commit atrocities, including the execution of children. On 5 March, the Nusrah Front executed two children during a ground offensive on Kanafez (Hama). On 22 August, in Muh

Hasan (Dayr al-Zawr), ISIL publicly amputated limbs of a 15-year-old boy accused of being affiliated with the Free Syrian Army.

156. Conflict-related sexual violence against children continued to be extremely difficult to document, with no case verified in 2015. In areas controlled by ISIL, girls reportedly continued to be vulnerable to early and forced marriage to fighters, while Yezidi girls captured in Iraq in 2014 were reportedly trafficked into the Syrian Arab Republic and used as sex slaves.

157. According to the Ministry of Education, since the beginning of the conflict, more than 6,500 schools have been destroyed, partially damaged, used as shelters for internally displaced persons or rendered otherwise inaccessible. The Ministry reported that 571 students and 419 teachers had been killed in 2015. The United Nations verified 69 attacks on educational facilities (60) and personnel (9) attributed to government forces and pro-Government groups (48), ISIL (11), the Nusrah Front (1), other armed groups (9) and unknown parties (1), which killed and maimed 174 children.

158. ISIL continued to use education to indoctrinate and recruit children. In December, it imposed new regulations of compulsory education for all boys from grades 1 to 12, and for girls from grades 1 to 4, which is a factor contributing to recruitment in ISIL-controlled areas.

159. Reports of attacks on medical facilities increased, with 122 attacks on 93 separate medical facilities and at least 60 medical personnel targeted or killed. The United Nations verified 41 attacks on health facilities (33) and health personnel (8) by government forces and pro-Government groups (32), ISIL (2), other armed groups (2) and unknown parties (5).

160. The United Nations verified eight incidents of military use of schools by government forces in Idlib in March (four of the schools were subsequently attacked by armed groups) and three incidents of military use of hospitals by ISIL in Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah.

161. Children continued to be abducted by parties to the conflict, with 21 cases (15 boys, 4 girls and 2 of unknown sex) attributed to government forces in a hostage-taking incident (13), ISIL (5) and 1 each to the Nusrah Front, the Kurdish People's Protection Units and groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army.

162. Parties to the conflict, in particular the Government, ISIL, the Nusrah Front and armed opposition groups, continued to use siege and starvation as a tactic of war. In January 2016, an estimated 393,700 people were living under siege. Deaths of children as a result of malnutrition were reported. Some 35,000 children targeted by polio vaccination campaigns could not be reached owing to denial of vaccinations by armed groups, including ISIL. The use of water as a weapon of war escalated significantly, with some 7.7 million civilians affected by deliberate water cuts. The United Nations verified attacks on humanitarian facilities and attacks and threats against humanitarian personnel.

163. I call upon the Government to respect its obligations and take urgent action to protect civilians. Furthermore, I urge the Kurdish People's Protection Units and the Free Syrian Army to end child recruitment and use, and implement the commitments previously made.

Yemen

164. The conflict in Yemen escalated significantly following the takeover of Sana'a by the Houthis in September 2014 and the beginning of air strikes by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia on 26 March 2015. Intensive aerial bombardment was followed by ground fighting, taking a devastating toll on the civilian population. Grave violations against children increased dramatically as a result of the escalating conflict.

165. The United Nations documented a fivefold increase in cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups, in particular following the escalation of 26 March, notwithstanding the challenges in verifying cases owing to security and access constraints. Of the 762 verified cases of recruitment of children (all boys), the majority were attributed to the Houthis (72 per cent), followed by the pro-Government popular committees (15 per cent) and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (9 per cent). Recruitment was predominant in Houthi strongholds, such as Amanat al-Asimah (103), Ta'izz (69) and Amran (34). A shift was observed from largely voluntary enlistment towards forced or involuntary recruitment through coercion, including through the provision of misleading information or incentives.

166. In 2015, 183 boys were deprived of liberty by popular committees, owing to their association with armed groups, predominantly in Abyan, Aden and Lahij. At least 48 children recruited by Houthi forces were captured by popular committees and deprived of liberty for three to five months, before being released as part of a prisoner exchange that included adults held by popular committees. In addition, a child in Amanat al-Asimah was accused of planting chips in installations to be targeted by the coalition, and deprived of liberty by the Houthis.

167. The United Nations verified a sixfold increase in the number of children killed and maimed compared with 2014, totalling 1,953 child casualties (785 children killed and 1,168 injured). More than 70 per cent were boys. Of the casualties, 60 per cent (510 deaths and 667 injuries) were attributed to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and 20 per cent (142 deaths and 247 injuries) to the Houthis. In 324 incidents, the responsible party could not be identified. ISIL claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device attack on a mosque in Amanat al-Asimah that killed seven children and injured six, in addition to causing many adult casualties. Of the child casualties, 60 per cent were caused by air strikes, predominantly in Amanat al-Asimah, Hajjah and Sa'dah. Significant civilian casualties, including children, as a result of air strikes continued to be documented early in 2016. Ground fighting accounted for 29 per cent of child casualties, with the vast majority in Ta'izz, Aden and Dali'. Child casualties as a result of landmines and explosive remnants of war were documented, with 15 children killed and 67 injured in Abyan, Aden, Amanat al-Asimah, Amran, Bayda', Dali', Dhamar, Lahij, Ma'rib, Sa'dah, Shabwah and Ta'izz.

168. The United Nations verified an incident of sexual violence against a child by a member of an armed group. However, it is likely that this category of violation is underreported.

169. The United Nations verified 101 incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals, which is double the number of incidents verified in 2014. Of the attacks, 90 per cent caused the partial or complete destruction of schools or health facilities, while the remaining 10 per cent involved attacks on protected personnel, including students. Of the attacks on schools and hospitals, 48 per cent were attributed to the coalition,

29 per cent to the Houthis and 20 per cent to unidentified perpetrators. More than half of the violations occurred in the period from April to June.

170. Fifty-nine incidents of attacks on 34 hospitals were verified, with multiple attacks on the same facilities, especially in Aden and Ta'izz. In Aden, six facilities were attacked 10 times. In Ta'izz, three health facilities were hit in 23 separate incidents. The majority of repeated attacks were attributed to Houthi forces. For example, the Jumhuriah hospital in Aden was attacked three times by the Houthis in April. In addition, coalition air strikes destroyed 15 health facilities in the governorate of Sa'dah.

171. The United Nations verified 42 attacks on schools, with the largest number in Amanat al-Asimah (12), Ta'izz (10) and Sa'dah (10). Of the attacks, 57 per cent were attributed to the coalition, 16 per cent to the Houthis and 21 per cent to unknown parties.

172. The United Nations verified 51 incidents of military use of schools, of which the large majority (44) took place in Ta'izz by Houthi forces (20), popular committees (8) and unknown armed groups (16). The Houthis also used schools in Aden, Dali' and Lahij, and two incidents were attributed to popular committees in Aden and unknown armed groups in Ibb. Four incidents of military use of hospitals were verified, of which three were attributed to the Houthis and one to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

173. The United Nations verified the abductions of 11 children, all of which were attributed to the Houthis, with the exception of a case attributed to Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. For example, two children were abducted next to Houthi barracks in Dali'. The Houthis and affiliated groups requested a ransom for the return of the children to the families, but the children were later killed.

174. Humanitarian access was severely restricted, with both the coalition and the Houthis imposing obstacles to the delivery of goods and services. The United Nations verified 16 incidents of denial of humanitarian access in Ta'izz, Sa'dah, Aden and Dali', mostly relating to the restriction of entry of humanitarian personnel, and threats and violence against personnel. The majority of verified incidents were attributed to the Houthis (11) and the coalition (3).

175. In May 2014, the Government signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. However, implementation did not advance in the light of the escalation of conflict. My Special Representative engaged in dialogue with the Government, Member States and subsidiary bodies of the Security Council to raise serious concerns about the devastating impact of the conflict on children. I call upon all parties to respect their international legal obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and encourage the inclusion of child protection concerns in negotiations to end the conflict.

B. Situations not on the agenda of the Security Council or other situations

Colombia

176. Substantial progress was made in the peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del

Pueblo (FARC-EP). In February, the group announced that it would stop recruiting children under 17 years of age and intended to release children under 15 years of age from its ranks. At the invitation of the Government, my Special Representative twice visited Havana to engage with the negotiating parties and facilitators on according priority to the release and reintegration of all under-aged members of FARC-EP, stressing that any action should be based on the principle of the best interest of the children to ensure their protection and successful reintegration, guarantee their rights as victims and prevent rerecruitment by other armed actors. Early in 2016, FARC-EP made public a commitment to ending the recruitment of children under 18 years of age and discussions on the separation of children continued. A historic agreement on the peace agenda item relating to victims was announced on 15 December, foreseeing the creation of a comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition for victims, which identified children as a vulnerable group.

177. Armed violence between FARC-EP and government forces reached its lowest level in 50 years and displacement decreased following the unilateral ceasefire declared by FARC-EP and the suspension of government aerial bombings. Nevertheless, activities by the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)[4] and post-demobilization armed groups continued to cause forced displacement.

178. The United Nations verified 289 cases of child recruitment and use by armed groups, the majority of which were documented following their separation and had been formerly associated with FARC-EP (182) and ELN (74). Cases were also attributed to the Ejército Popular de Liberación (1) and post-demobilization and other armed groups (32).

179. The killing of 12 children and maiming of 10, mainly as a result of landmines, were verified. With 31 of its 32 departments contaminated, landmines are a serious concern for the protection of children in Colombia. On 7 March, the Government and FARC-EP announced that they would carry out joint humanitarian demining initiatives (joint communiqué No. 52) and the parties began working on pilot projects.

180. The country task force on monitoring and reporting recorded 10 girls who were victims of sexual violence committed by the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (8), FARC-EP and an unidentified perpetrator. One additional case by a member of the Colombian military in 2012 was reported in 2015. The perpetrator was in detention awaiting trial at the time of writing (March 2016).

181. Eleven schools were damaged in crossfire and by landmines and explosive remnants of war. At least two teachers were killed by unidentified armed groups and allegations of threats against teachers by FARC-EP, ELN, the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia and Los Rastrojos were received. In addition, there were one case of military use of schools by FARC-EP and four cases by the Colombian military in violation of directives issued by the Ministry of Defence.

182. I welcome the decision of the Constitutional Court of 18 February 2016 that children recruited by all armed groups, including post-demobilization groups, are victims and have the right to reparations guaranteed in the Victims' Act (No. 1448 of 2011). This is an important step forward that aims to guarantee equal treatment

[4] ELN has been listed for recruitment and use of children in annex II to the present report since 2003. The launch of peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and ELN was announced in March 2016.

between children associated with guerrilla groups and those associated with post-demobilization groups, by ensuring that every recruited child will be treated primarily as a victim and receive adequate reintegration support.

183. There has been historic progress in Colombia and I encourage the Government to secure guarantees for non-repetition and pay particular attention to the specific protection needs of indigenous children, children of African descent and children in marginalized areas, so as to address and prevent violations against children.

India

184. The United Nations continued to receive reports of the recruitment and use of children as young as 6 years of age by armed groups, including the Naxalites, in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal States. Reports indicate that children were coerced to join children's units ("Bal Dasta"), where they were trained and used as couriers and informants, to plant improvised explosive devices and in front-line operations against national security forces. For example, in April, the Bharatiya Communist Party (Maoist) reportedly forced the inhabitants of seven villages in Gumla district, Jharkhand State, to hand over five children per village to join their ranks. To avoid such forcible recruitment, families have resorted to sending children away from home at a young age, leading to children dropping out of school.

185. In the eastern provinces, children were killed and injured as a result of violence and fighting between armed groups and national security forces. In June, 12 Communist Party of India (Maoist) fighters, including 4 children dressed in uniforms, were killed in a joint police operation in Bhalwahi village, Jharkhand State.

186. The abduction of children, especially girls, by armed groups was a serious concern. Abducted children are subjected to further grave violations and abuses, and have been forced to serve in combat functions, exposed to sexual violence and, reportedly, used as human shields. In April, Maoists reportedly abducted five girls aged between 10 and 13 years of age from Karcha village, West Bengal State, and their whereabouts remain unknown.

Nigeria

187. Early in 2015, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, renamed Islamic State's West African Province and commonly known as Boko Haram, controlled large swathes of territory in the north-eastern States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. In response, the Nigerian security forces intensified their military operations, in conjunction with the Civilian Joint Task Force, as well as local pro-Government vigilante groups, retaking control of territory. According to the Nigerian security forces, only two local government areas were under Boko Haram control (Abadam and Mobar in Borno State) by December.

188. As Boko Haram increasingly resorted to hit-and-run attacks on "soft targets", the group also intensified its operations, including suicide attacks, which have spread from north-east Nigeria to Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, causing a significant number of casualties among civilians and large-scale displacement. Consequently, by the end of December, in excess of 1.8 million persons had been displaced within Nigeria, including more than 1 million children, and 220,304 were registered as refugees in neighbouring countries.

189. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 278 children (143 boys and 135 girls) by Boko Haram (225) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (53). Twenty-one girls were used in suicide attacks claimed by Boko Haram, 11 of which were documented in the fourth quarter. Children were used in suicide attacks not only in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon and Chad, with cases also reported early in 2016. Of the 1,010 children (422 boys and 588 girls) encountered or rescued during the course of military operations in north-east Nigeria, 204 (117 girls and 87 boys) had been recruited and used by Boko Haram. With regards to the Civilian Joint Task Force, children were used to man checkpoints and as messengers and spies.

190. Cases of 129 children detained for alleged association with Boko Haram were documented (69 boys and 60 girls), including 85 held in military barracks in Maiduguri, 22 at the Aguata camp in eastern Nigeria by the Office of the National Security Adviser, after passing through the Chad security corridor, and 21 girls in Lagos detained by the Nigeria Department of State Services and the Nigerian security forces. On 1 December, an 11-year-old boy was arrested in Maiduguri, reportedly for being a suspected "Boko Haram terrorist", and his picture displayed on posters disseminated throughout Nigeria. The poster appeared to include at least three other boys. In November, the Nigerian security forces handed over to the Governor of Borno State 48 boys and 10 girls who had been in military detention in Maiduguri since August for alleged association with Boko Haram.

191. At least 5,480 persons were reportedly killed in 352 incidents, a decrease of 26 per cent compared with 2014. The United Nations verified the killing of 244 children (109 boys and 135 girls), mostly in Borno (130), Adamawa (54) and Yobe (48). Sixty-five of them were killed in 13 suicide attacks committed by children. A total of 112 children (54 boys and 58 girls) were also maimed.

192. In May and June, 253 children (84 boys and 169 girls) encountered during military operations participated in an "deradicalization programme" run by the Office of the National Security Adviser in a facility in Kaduna State, to which the United Nations was given access in June. The Office reported that four girls were pregnant as a result of sexual violence during their captivity and that all 68 mothers of the 112 children under 5 years of age had been either raped and/or were wives of Boko Haram members. The facility was closed down on 6 November, but it was unclear whether the women and children who returned to their communities or camps for displaced persons received reintegration support.

193. Since 2014, an estimated 1,500 schools have been destroyed in north-east Nigeria, including 524 in Borno State. This has prevented access to education for more than 400,000 children. Five schools were reportedly used for military purposes by Boko Haram in Bauchi State, and three schools by the Nigerian security forces since April 2014 in Maiduguri and Chibok Local Government Area, Borno State. To strengthen the protection of education, Nigeria endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, agreeing to use the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

194. Abduction by Boko Haram continued, with 162 cases documented, of which the United Nations verified 26 (15 boys and 11 girls). In addition, 693 children encountered or rescued during military operations (327 boys and 366 girls) had reportedly been abducted. There is no indication whether any of the Chibok schoolgirls, abducted in 2014, were among those rescued.

195. Engagement with the Nigerian authorities continued, including on the handover of children encountered during operations by the Nigerian security forces to civilian authorities. In December, the United Nations assisted the National Human Rights Commission and the Nigerian security forces in organizing a workshop to review the military code of conduct and rules of engagement for operations against Boko Haram. With regard to efforts to combat impunity, I welcome the establishment of a human rights desk at the army headquarters tasked to investigate human rights violations committed by the military, and I encourage the inclusion of dedicated child protection capacity to investigate grave violations committed against children. I am concerned by the number of children recruited and used by the Civilian Joint Task Force and I call upon the Government to take swift action to prevent further cases.

Pakistan

196. In 2015, attacks by armed groups in Pakistan declined by 48 per cent compared with 2014. The majority of attacks were attributed to TTP, predominantly in Baluchistan. The Government's military operations in North Waziristan against armed groups continued throughout 2015.

197. Reports were received of the use of religious schools for recruitment and military training of children by TTP and other armed groups (see S/2015/336).

198. Child casualties were reported as a result of indiscriminate attacks and armed violence. For example, on 4 January, four children were killed and 10 injured when an improvised explosive device detonated at a volleyball match in Orakzai Agency, Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In October, a suicide attack on a religious procession in Jacobabad, Sindh Province, killed 18 children and injured more than 40 others. Further indiscriminate attacks occurred early in 2016, when a large bomb blast claimed by a TTP faction killed more than 20 children in Lahore on 27 March.

199. Fourteen attacks on educational institutions across Pakistan were recorded, a decline of 65 per cent compared with 2014. They included the destruction of schools, including girls' schools, and occurred mostly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (eight), Sindh (four) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (two).

200. Notwithstanding the continued targeting of health personnel, humanitarian access to children increased, in particular for polio workers in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Attacks on polio workers continued, however, with 11 people killed in six attacks. For example, four members of a polio team were killed following their abduction in Northern Baluchistan. In addition, 76 security incidents, including 42 cases of threats and intimidation against polio workers, were reported throughout Pakistan.

201. I am concerned by reports of children being sentenced to death by military courts on terrorism-related charges. I urge the Government to adhere to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits capital punishment for offences committed by persons under 18 years of age.

Philippines

202. There were limited large-scale armed engagements in 2015. However, sporadic low-intensity clashes continued to affect children, predominantly in Mindanao. An increased number of grave violations were documented in indigenous communities

resulting from the conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army (NPA), increasingly involving the Alamara and Magahat paramilitary groups with alleged links to the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

203. The United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 17 children, including 15 children used as human shields, by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in one incident, and two recruited by NPA. Unverified reports indicated that the Abu Sayyaf Group recruited around 30 children in Basilan in April.

204. Two cases of detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups were verified. In January, a 17-year-old boy was detained and questioned by the Armed Forces of the Philippines for alleged association with NPA in the Davao region.

205. The United Nations verified the killing of 6 children and the injury of 25. A third of the casualties were attributed to the Abu Sayyaf Group. For example, in May, a boy was beheaded by the Group in Basilan for allegedly spying. Two verified incidents were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, involving the killing of two children and injury of two others. On 18 August, in Bukidnon Province, northern Mindanao, the Armed Forces of the Philippines killed five family members in front of their house, including two boys aged 14 and 17 years. Two injuries were attributed to the Magahat paramilitary group, one killing to NPA and one injury to the National Police. The other 13 casualties were attributed to crossfire or explosive remnants of war.

206. The United Nations verified the rape of a 14-year-old girl by three soldiers in three separate incidents between May and July. The soldiers were court-martialled and their superior was recommended for administrative sanctions. However, the civilian criminal proceedings for rape were dismissed owing to insufficient evidence.

207. Almost all verified cases of attacks on schools and education personnel took place in indigenous communities. Private schools run by non-governmental organizations were systematically targeted for alleged links to NPA. Five incidents were attributed to the Magahat paramilitary group, three to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, two to the Alamara paramilitary group and one each to NPA and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. In a particularly grave incident, the director of a school run by a non-governmental organization was killed in an indigenous community in Caraga by the Magahat paramilitary group. No arrests have been made, despite warrants being issued. The United Nations verified 10 incidents of military use of schools; 6 incidents were attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3 incidents jointly to the Armed Forces of the Philippines and paramilitary groups and 1 to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters.

208. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front demonstrated a strong commitment to the action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, achieving significant progress. The majority of the benchmarks have been reached and, in November, its leaders agreed on the steps required to identify and disengage any children associated with it. The full implementation of the action plan also requires safeguards to prevent recruitment and association, linked to the implementation of existing accountability mechanisms. Services to minimize the risk of reassociation of children will also be important.

209. In an encouraging development, in 2015, UNICEF renewed engagement with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines/NPA on its declaration and programme of action for the rights, protection and welfare of children.

210. The United Nations continues to work with the Armed Forces of the Philippines on its 2012 strategic plan on prevention and response to grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict to ensure that it strengthens the protection of children in the light of continuing violations involving the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Thailand

211. Violence in southern Thailand continued, notwithstanding the reinitiation of dialogue between the Government and an umbrella organization of armed groups.

212. Although no cases of recruitment and use of children were reported, according to information provided by the Government, an armed group trained children as young as 13 years of age in the use of weapons in Narathiwat Province early in January 2016. The United Nations continued to receive reports of children being detained for alleged association with armed groups.

213. The United Nations received reports of the killing of 4 children and the injury of 15 in shootings and improvised explosive device attacks in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala Provinces. This is a significant decrease compared with 2014 (23 children killed and 65 injured).

214. Schools and education personnel continued to be targeted by armed groups. According to the Ministry of Education, as at November, two teachers and a student had been killed, and a teacher and two students injured, in such attacks. In addition, on 11 September, a bomb attack at the entrance of a community school in Pattani Province injured five students between 3 and 15 years of age; a criminal investigation is continuing. The authorities have provided security escorts to teachers in affected areas.

215. I welcome and encourage the continuing dialogue between the Government and the United Nations country team on strengthening the protection of children in the southern border provinces and on access to those areas to conduct independent verification and reporting of alleged violations against children. In December, during a consultation on the dialogue process, convened by the Internal Security Operation Command for Southern Thailand, civil society organizations and the United Nations raised the need to include children in the agenda of the dialogue process to strengthen their protection in the south, which I strongly support.

IV. Recommendations

216. **I am deeply concerned at the scale and increasing severity of the grave violations that were committed in 2015, including continuing large-scale abduction, and call upon all parties to immediately end and take all measures to prevent grave violations against children.**

217. **I urge Member States to ensure that their engagement in hostilities and responses to all threats to peace and security, including in efforts to counter violent extremism, are conducted in full compliance with international**

humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. It is unacceptable that the failure to do so has resulted in numerous violations of children's rights. Member States should include specific mitigating measures for the protection of children in their responses, in particular when conducting aerial bombing campaigns or ground operations. I also call upon all parties to conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, and to consider making a commitment to this effect.

218. **I encourage the Member States concerned by the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to redouble their efforts to fully implement their action plans in the coming year and invite regional organizations, the international community and all relevant partners to provide increased support to those making progress.**

219. **I urge Member States to hand over children encountered during military operations to civilian child protection actors as soon as possible, in accordance with their international obligations and the best interests of the child. It is crucial that there be appropriate resources for the reintegration of the children separated from parties to conflict, with attention given to psychosocial support and the needs of girls.**

220. **I call upon Member States to treat children associated with armed groups, including those engaged in violent extremism, as victims entitled to full protection of their human rights and to urgently put in place alternatives to the detention and prosecution of children.**

221. **I call upon Member States to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of grave violations against children. I encourage the donor community to support national justice systems in conflict and post-conflict situations, including by providing resources and technical capacity.**

222. **I encourage the Security Council to highlight, in its resolutions and debates, the prevention of displacement, the rights of children displaced by conflict and the obligations of States of origin, transit and destination.**

223. **I encourage Member States and regional organizations involved in negotiating cessation of hostilities or peace agreements to include specific child protection provisions to maximize opportunities to engage with parties and enhance the protection of children.**

224. **I call upon the Security Council to continue to request the deployment of dedicated child protection capacity to United Nations peace operations, in order to mainstream child protection, conduct dialogue on action plans, release and reintegrate children and for monitoring and reporting.**

V. Observations

225. I am shocked by the scale of the grave violations committed by parties to conflict in many situations, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Noted herein are the complex environments created by aerial operations by some Member States' armed forces and international coalitions, which killed and maimed many children. State-allied armed groups and militias have also increasingly been used to fight in support of government forces.

In some cases, State-allied armed groups have recruited and used children and committed other violations. Furthermore, I am gravely concerned at the increasing prevalence of deprivation of liberty of children allegedly associated with parties to conflict.

226. Member States should consider, as a matter of priority, changes in policies, military procedures and legislation, where necessary, to prevent violations and protect children. I have previously stated that those who engage in military action resulting in numerous violations of children's rights will find themselves under scrutiny by the United Nations. Accountability remains a key priority and a shared responsibility in order to end and prevent grave violations against children.

227. I reiterate that all parties to conflict identified in the present report should work with my Special Representative to protect children caught up in conflict.

VI. Lists in the annexes to the present report

228. In accordance with Security Council resolution 2225 (2015), Al-Shabaab (Somalia), Boko Haram (Nigeria), LRA (Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo), ISIL (Iraq) and the Taliban (Afghanistan) are listed for abduction of children. Those five groups have committed patterns of abduction of children over a number of years. SPLA (South Sudan) is also listed for abduction as a result of hundreds of violations attributed to it in 2015. Other parties have been added to existing trigger violations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Raia Mutomboki[5] is listed for the recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children. In Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force is listed for the recruitment and use of children, with more than 50 verified cases in 2015. In South Sudan, SPLA is now also listed for sexual violence against children, with more than 100 incidents attributed to government forces. In Yemen, owing to the very large number of violations attributed to the two parties, the Houthis/Ansar Allah and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition are listed for killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals.

229. Other changes in the lists resulted from changes in the respective situations. With the removal of the specific regional section in the report, the Lord's Resistance Army, in addition to being listed for abduction, is now listed in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of, and sexual violence against, children. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mayi Mayi "Lafontaine" and former elements of the Coalition des patriotes résistants congolais are now referred to as the Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix also known as Mayi Mayi "Lafontaine", while Mayi Mayi Simba "Morgan" is now referred to as Mayi Mayi Simba.

[5] The main commanders identified within Raia Mutomboki are (Major) Bwansolu Lizaba (alias "Mwami Alexandre"), (Major) Eyadema Bugugu and (Major) Kikuni Savikungi.

Annex I

List of parties that recruit or use children, kill or maim children, commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, or engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals, or abduct children in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council*

Parties in Afghanistan

1. Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police[a,•]
2. Haqqani Network[a,b]
3. Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar[a,b]
4. Taliban forces, including the Tora Bora Front, Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Qur'an wal-Sunna and the Latif Mansur Network[a,b,d,e]

Parties in the Central African Republic

1. Former Séléka coalition and associated armed groups[a,b,c,d]
2. Local defence militias known as the anti-balaka[a,b,c]
3. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]

Parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. Allied Democratic Forces[a,b,d]
2. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo)[a,c,•]
3. Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda[a,c,d]
4. Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri[a,c,d]
5. Lord's Resistance Army[a,b,c,e]
6. Mayi Mayi Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain "Colonel Janvier"[a]
7. Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix (UPCP) also known as Mayi Mayi "Lafontaine"[a]
8. Mayi Mayi Simba[a,c]

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* The parties underlined have been in the annexes for at least five years and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators.

[a] Parties that recruit and use children.

[b] Parties that kill and maim children.

[c] Parties that commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Parties that engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Parties that abduct children.

• This party has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).

9. Mayi Mayi Kata Katanga[a]
10. Nduma Defence of Congo/Cheka[a,b]
11. Mayi Mayi Nyatura[a]
12. Raia Mutomboki[a,c]

Parties in Iraq

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d,e]

Parties in Mali

1. Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad[a,c]
2. Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest[a,c]
3. Ansar Eddine[a,c]

Parties in Myanmar

1. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army[a]
2. Kachin Independence Army[a]
3. Karen National Liberation Army[a]
4. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council[a]
5. Karenni Army[a]
6. Shan State Army-South[a]
7. Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated border guard forces[a,*]
8. United Wa State Army[a]

Parties in Somalia

1. Al-Shabaab[a,b,c]
2. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ)[a]
3. Somali National Army[a,b,*]

Parties in South Sudan

1. Sudan People's Liberation Army[a,b,c,e,*]
2. Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition[a,b,*]
3. White Army[a]

Parties in the Sudan

1. Government security forces, including the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Popular Defence Forces and the Sudan Police Forces[a,*]
2. Justice and Equality Movement[a]
3. Pro-Government militias[a]

4. Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid[a]
5. Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi[a]
6. Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North[a]

Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic

1. Ahrar al-Sham[a,b]
2. Free Syrian Army — affiliated groups[a]
3. Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and the shabbiha militia[b,c,d]
4. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant[a,b,c,d]
5. Nusrah Front[a,b]
6. People's Protection Units[a]

Parties in Yemen

1. Houthis/Ansar Allah[a,b,d]
2. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula/Ansar al-Sharia[a]
3. Government forces, including the Yemeni Armed Forces, the First Armoured Division, the Military Police, the special security forces and Republican Guards[a,c]
4. Pro-Government militias, including the Salafists and Popular Committees[a]
5. Saudi Arabia-led coalition[b,d]

Annex II

List of parties that recruit or use children, kill or maim children, commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, or engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals, or abduct children in situations of armed conflict not on the agenda of the Security Council, or in other situations*

Parties in Colombia

1. Ejército de Liberación Nacional[a]
2. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo[a]

Parties in Nigeria

1. Civilian Joint Task Force[a]
2. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram[a,b,d,e]

Parties in the Philippines

1. Abu Sayyaf Group[a]
2. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters[a]
3. Moro Islamic Liberation Front[a,•]
4. New People's Army[a]

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* The parties underlined have been in the annexes for at least five years and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators.

[a] Parties that recruit and use children.

[b] Parties that kill and maim children.

[c] Parties that commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

[d] Parties that engage in attacks on schools and/or hospitals.

[e] Parties that abduct children.

• This party has concluded an action plan with the United Nations in line with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005).